

Reading Promotion Programs in South Korea

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Abstract

Korean people are among the most passionate about reading. The number of new book titles published in South Korea in 2003 was 35,371 and the total number of printed copies was 111,450,224. Its publishing market reached \$2.3 billion. To encourage the publishing and printing movement, the Korean government developed a draft law to revitalize the printing industry and allocated about \$8 billion for that. To encourage students to read, the Ministry of Tourism and Youth announced concrete plans for the Youth's Reading Movement. They distribute book coupons. The Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with the Korean Publishers Association and the Kyobo Book Center held the Grand Book Festival, in addition to the Culture Train, the Subway Book Fair, translating Korean literature into other languages, creating a huge database for public libraries in Korea, campaigns run by the publishers' consortium, and television programs; all to promote reading among the young generation. Each of these is described in the article in detail.

Education in South Korea

Koreans consider education important for self-actualization and social progress. Educated people in Korea have played, and are still playing, a major role in the rapid economic growth Korea has achieved in the past decades. They introduced modern schools in the 1880's. With the establishment of the Korean Republic in 1948, the Korean government began establishing a modern educational system. The liberation of Korea from Japan in 1945 marked a turning point in the history of education in Korea. As the country transitioned from a totalitarian to a democratic regime, its officials focused their attention primarily on providing citizens with equal opportunities in education. The period between 1945-1970 witnessed a significant expansion in education. Despite the devastation and economic suffering brought by the Korean War between 1950-1953, Korea succeeded in overcoming illiteracy. In 1953, the six years of primary school became compulsory. In the 46 years following liberation, the number of schools increased from 3,000 to 19,693. The number of students increased from 1.5 million to 11.5 million students (a quarter of the population), and the number of its universities became about 300, even though the country's population does not exceed 50 million. Today, every primary-age student receives free education according to the compulsory educational system.

This expansion in education was accompanied by the emergence of a number of educational problems. At the end of the 1960s, Korean educators focused their attention on these problems and developed a number of projects to develop curricula and teaching methods, including the cancellation of the primary school completion exam and moving to middle school. This led to an increase in the percentage of students who moved to middle school from 55% to 75%. The level of education among the people increased, and it also resulted in the graduation of trained workers required for the industrialization process. In 1968, the Koreans implemented a number of educational reforms that emphasized the philosophical aspects of education, which include: (1) instilling national identity among the people; (2) developing their respect for their history, customs and traditions; (3) developing innovation and the spirit of pioneering to revive national strength and achieve general prosperity; (4) The need for a balance between development and tradition, the needs of the individual and the needs of the nation.

In addition to the above, over the past 60-70 years, Korea has witnessed a noticeable change in illiteracy rates. In the late 1930s, the illiteracy rate was 30%. In the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century, the Korean government carried out campaigns to eradicate illiteracy throughout the country, and these campaigns were successful. In 1990, the literacy rate was 99.1% among males and 93.5% among females. In 1995, the percentage of learners was 99.3% male and 96.7% female. That is, the percentage of male learners increased by 0.2%, and female learners by 3.2%. This reduced the gap between the percentage of male and female learners. Since then, the Korean government has no longer paid any attention to the issue of illiteracy but started to pay more attention to computer literacy than to literacy.

Regarding the amount of spending on education, the percentage of spending on primary education constituted 79.3% of public spending (in 1990), and the percentage decreased to 62.3% (in 1991), and decreased to 61.9% (in 1992), and rose to 62% (in 1993). It was 61.4% (in 1994), 61.5% (in 1995), and decreased to 55.1% (in 1997). That is, there was a gradual decrease in the amount of spending. The Korean government has shifted its priorities to investing its money in higher education rather than primary education, because the situation of primary education has stabilized. Despite the economic recession between 1996-1997, the Korean government invested approximately the same amount in primary education, as was the case in the previous years.

The volume of public spending per pupil in the primary stage (GNP per capita), is about 8.8% of the national income (in 1990), 9% of the national income (in 1991), 8.8% (in 1992), and 9.6% (in 1993), 9.5% (in 1995), 10% (in 1996), and 12.3% (in 1997). That is, there was a slight increase in public spending on education. The noticeable increase in the amount of public spending on education indicates the extent of the Korean government's interest and consideration for education as a top priority because it invests its resources in it.

To adapt to the rapid changes in information technology in the twenty-first century, the Korean government is carrying out reforms in the educational system that move in two directions. The first is to emphasize the development of informationalization skills in citizens, because skill in using information technology in all aspects of life and in education will determine Korea's competitive strength at the individual and corporate levels. The Korean government, represented by the Ministry of Education, has embodied its specific plans in establishing the Multimedia Education Support Center, EDUNET, the Advanced Academic Research Center, and other projects related to developing information skills among citizens. Very large financial investments have been allocated to computer and Internet education for housewives, farmers, fishermen, and the elderly, in addition to teachers and students.

The second trend was interest in lifelong education, that is, building an open-learning society. To introduce the public to the idea of lifelong education, the Korean government - in cooperation with the media and other civil society organizations - began to develop a framework for adult and lifelong education as follows: (1) Expanding the base of university education; (2) adult education and school-based lifelong education; (3) additional (supplementary) education; (4) in-service training; (5) adult education and lifelong education carried out by non-governmental organizations.

It should be noted that the second direction in education reform is inseparable from the first direction (i.e., expanding the use of educational technology in daily life and educational environments). It has been shown that the use of lifelong education programs based on the Internet is very suitable for meeting the needs of learners who complain of lack of time and distance from place of residence due to the work they do during the day. These two directions (lifelong education and advanced technology) are characterized by creating positive possibilities to improve the quality of life of every citizen in every field, whether educational, health, or cultural. The last ten years have provided clear and practical evidence of the validity of these directions through quantitative and qualitative examination of the information collected by specialists about training in basic skills and education for a better life.

Korean people and reading

The Korean people are among the people who love and care about reading the most. The number of new book titles published in South Korea in 2003 was 35,371 and the number of printed copies was 111,450,224. The number of printed copies in 2002 reached 117,499,547. If we take into account that the population of South Korea is 49,489,750 million, we will find that the average number of printed copies is between 2.31-2.37 per person per year. The average price of a 251-page book is 10,975 Wan. The percentage of purely scientific books increased by 12.2%, followed by philosophy books (11.5%), and literature books by 10.2%. The percentage of general books decreased by 26.2%, followed by student reference books by 16.7%, and children's books by 14.4%. Printed titles mostly focused on cartoon characters (9,081 titles, or 25.6%), followed by 5,586 titles in literature, and 5,219 titles in children's books. The size of the publishing market in Korea amounted to \$2.3 billion, and it decreased by 12.8% compared to the size of the publishing market in 2002.

Ways of promoting reading among Koreans

Among the plans, projects and strategies that Korea is following to encourage reading among citizens, in general, and young people, in particular, are the following:

(1) Publishing and Printing Industry Promotion Law

To encourage the publishing and printing movement, the Korean government developed a draft law to revitalize the printing industry in the twenty-first century (the age of knowledge and information). It was approved by the Korean National Assembly on July 31, 2002. The law was issued in August 2002, ratified by the State Council on February 18, 2003, and became effective on February 27, 2003. The Korean government has allocated \$8 billion to encourage and develop the publishing industry. One of the most prominent features of this law is the introduction of a book price fixation system. Although the law has been in effect since 1977 AD with the aim of normalizing the distribution system. However, discounts on books have become common in recent years, causing turmoil in the market. The Minister of Culture and Tourism and Chairman of the Fair Trade Committee agreed on the need to oblige publishers to sell books at cover price as long as they were not published more than a year ago, with a fine imposed on violators. It is permitted to reduce the prices of books sold online by no more than 10%. The fixed price system for a book will be applied for a period of five years from the date of law enforcement.

(2) National Funds for the Culture Industry

In 2002, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism announced the National Funds for the Culture Industry with a budget of \$145.8 million (an increase of 28.5% over the previous year). Of this, \$8.08 million was allocated to support the publishing industry (an increase of 32.6% over the previous year), and \$0.8 million was allocated to modernizing the printing and publishing system. \$38.5 million was allocated to digital content. These amounts will be pumped into three projects. Half of the amount will be allocated to technology for production, storage, distribution and service of digital content. The number of projects to support cultural content in this field increased from 10 to 13 to support cultural content, to create and operate distance education systems, and to implement a system called “Digital Objects Identifier”.

(3) Youth Reading Movement

To encourage young people to read, the Ministry of Tourism and Youth announced concrete plans for the youth reading movement on the occasion of Korean Book Day on September 24, and the Culture Month in October. The Ministry of Culture distributes book coupons to middle school students from mid-November to May, each coupon is worth \$4, with the aim of encouraging them to read well and instilling a lifelong reading habit in them. Vouchers were distributed to 327,226 students, or 53% of first-year middle school students, in all parts of the country except Seoul and six other major cities. Anyone who has a coupon can buy a book from among 196 titles, chosen by the Youth Reading Movement Committee, which includes members from literature, culture, the academic field, and youth organizations.

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(5) Grand Book Festival

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, in cooperation with the Korean Publishers Association and the Kyobo Book Center, is holding the Great Book Festival on the second of October for five days, with the aim of developing the public's awareness of the importance of reading, making the culture of reading part of people's daily lives, and making young people feel that reading is a part of life, and to acquire desirable

reading habits. The festival includes exhibitions and events. The exhibitions include new and old titles, North Korean publications, excellent books for children and young people, books recommended by prominent figures, electronic books, and books and magazines in Braille for the blind. Activities include book signing programs and dialogues with famous writers.

(6) Metro Book Messe Book Fair

The Korean Publishers Association and the Book Sharing Movement Committee, in cooperation with the Seoul City Subway Authority, held the 2002 Subway Book Fair, from March 15 to June 30, the last day of the FIFA World Cup, with the aim of encouraging reading among all Korean people. 10,000 books were displayed on shelves inside the trains specially made for this purpose. The title of the exhibition was "Talking About Culture Through Books." Ten exhibitions were organized in ten trailers, each bearing a title such as: "Reading with Children," "Scientific Books," "History of Books," "Books that Opened the Twenty-First Century," "A World of Magazines," "An Important Book in My Life," "Books, People and Nature", "Libraries in our Neighborhood", "Discovering Korean Culture". The Subway Fair and the Seoul International Book Fair were considered occasions to celebrate the 2002 World Cup Games.

(7) Culture Trains

In the year 2000, the Korean Publishers Association, in cooperation with the Committee for the Book Sharing Movement, created the Culture Train, which carries two book titles throughout the subway in Seoul. There are 12 train cars, with small shelves above the passenger seats, each carrying 300 books, and train passengers can use them during the trip.

(8) Seoul International Book Fair in 2003

The Korean Publishers Association held the 2003 Seoul International Book Fair from June 4-9. While the number of foreign publishers decreased due to fear of SARS, the number of local publishers increased. 130 local publishers and 66 foreign publishers participated in the exhibition. There was a special exhibition titled "Best-Selling Titles of the Past 100 Years" that gave visitors an idea of the history of modern publishing in Korea, which began with the introduction of modern publishing methods. There was another distinguished exhibition entitled "The Most Beautiful Books from Around the World." 155 titles were displayed from the "Art of the Book" Foundation, based in Frankfurt, Germany. These books won awards between 1991-2002 for their good design. The Korean Publishers Association invited Mr. Holger Illing, Vice President of the Frankfurt Book Fair, to attend the 2003 Seoul International Book Fair. The two parties agreed that Korea would be a guest of honor at the 2005 Frankfurt Exhibition.

(9) Seoul International Book Fair 2002

The year 2002, the Seoul International Book Fair was held between June 7-12 under the slogan "Deep in the Book, Deep in the World, Deep in the Future." Since this book fair coincided with the 2002 FIFA World Cup, an exhibition titled "Beautiful Korea" was organized for the exhibition's visitors, both Koreans and foreigners, who came to Korea to attend football matches. 500 titles and 70 images from Korea's cultural heritage, contemporary culture, folk heritage, and nature in Korea were displayed. This exhibition also provided the opportunity for visitors to learn about the Korean publishing culture in the past and present. An international workshop was held on translating and publishing Korean literature in cooperation with the Korean Literature Translation Institute. Specialists and those interested in translating and publishing Korean literature discussed ways to inform the world of Korean literature.

(10) Publishing house campaigns

Publishers ran campaigns throughout the year inviting people to "Rediscover Books." They posted posters everywhere. They posted pictures of famous actors reading on the posters, and wrote above the posters, "People who read books are beautiful."

(11) Establishing a Contents Investment Cooperative for Cultural

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has developed a plan to organize an investment cooperative for cultural content worth twenty million dollars, aiming to support the culture industries, attract investments in cultural content industries, encourage production, and improve product distribution paths, in addition to

raising the level of competition between Korean products in the global markets, and increasing their export. The plan consist of three parts, two of which will focus on digital book companies, multimedia and digital rights management. The third part will focus on investing in the game industry, characters, and animation.

(12) Publisher network

Bookstore owners and publishers had a role in selling books online. Each publisher used its own codes to list and manage sales, which led to high costs and made the process of counting the actual number of books sold and the remaining inventory difficult. The Korean Publishers Association established a comprehensive, integrated network for distribution and publications that enables book publishing and selling houses to use the same symbol in their sales lists, and the same information on their publications, such as book titles and lists of contents. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has developed a 3-year project and formed a special committee to establish an integrated network of distributors, wholesalers, and three huge bookstores. The project began by building networks and an online information base. It was completed in 2002. The government provided financial support amounting to \$4.5 million. All publishers, bookstore owners, online bookstores, and wholesalers will be able to use the same codes to list book content, the same information about books, and know the correct number of books ordered online and directly from bookstores.

(13) Establishing a unified base for public libraries

The Ministry of Culture has created a huge unified database of public libraries in Korea that provides the user with a complete list of book titles, publications, digital and visual materials and their content. Thus digital libraries have been established. Seoul's Seongbuk Digital Library represents the result of efforts aiming at transforming Korean libraries into digital libraries to support communication via the Internet.

(14) Establishment of the Korean Literature Translation Center

Korean literature was not known in the international literary scene due to the lack of works translated into English. Therefore, the Korean Ministry of Culture and Tourism sought to establish a center for translating Korean literature into other languages, and to collect Korean literary works translated into other languages and store them in a comprehensive database that will be available to readers in the form of a website. The state funds this center. The goal of establishing the Translation Center was to raise the status of Korean literature in the world, introduce it to the world, enable a Korean writer to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, and distribute literary works outside Korea in cooperation with major publishing houses in the world.

(15) The role of television programs

Kim Younghee, a producer working in the entertainment department of a television station, said that when he was a student in Britain, he was impressed by the English people's passion for reading and the large number of books they read. He said to himself: "I should strive to make Koreans read more." This is what prompted him to think about preparing a television program that does not aim to introduce people who love reading to new books, but rather uses a simple and entertaining idea to make viewers who do not read feel that reading is a wonderful experience.

(16) Use of the Internet

Until recently, books were the only means of transmitting knowledge, but with the advent of the Internet, we now have reading options such as e-book readers and hand-held computers. The reader will be able to view digital books in various fields. Priority will be given to books that can be read once through scanning, such as light novels and guidebooks. With the advent of modern means, the amount of information increases day by day. Koreans feel an overwhelming desire to use information and knowledge for self-expression, and they need mental skills to analyze information and evaluate its quality accurately. Reading is the means through which they can develop these skills. With the advent of the Internet, Koreans began to do most of their reading online and search for solutions to the problems they faced online. Young people have become more comfortable using visual means than written ones and have gained the ability to browse and read quickly as opposed to reading in depth. They also like books with pictures, drawings, and attractive covers. The emergence of electronic books will lead to a departure from the habit of reading a book from

cover to cover. There has been a boom in Koreans' use of the Internet in the past few years, the result of which is:

Conclusion

The Korean Ministry of Education is not the only body responsible for supporting reading and culture among students and youth in Korea. There is the Ministry of Culture, the Publishers Union, and the Kyobo Book Center. There are a number of movements that encourage reading, such as the movement to encourage reading among young people, the Book Sharing Movement, and the distribution of book vouchers. They have many occasions to encourage reading and culture, such as the Korean Book Day on September 24 and Culture Month in October, and they take advantage of special occasions such as the World Cup to encourage reading and promote books. They regularly hold festivals and exhibitions, such as the Great Book Festival, the Subway Book Fair, the Culture Train, and International Book Fairs. They hang posters calling for reading everywhere throughout the year. The government issues laws to support reading, culture and publishing, such as the Law to Support the Publishing and Printing Industry, and allocates huge budgets to reading, books and culture that increase year after year, such as the National Fund for the Culture Industry. They also employed modern technologies such as digital libraries, the Internet, information bases, and linking libraries and publishing houses in an online network to encourage reading, serve readers, and encourage book publishing and distribution inside and outside Korea. The media, such as television, newspapers, magazines, and the Internet, play a major role in encouraging and motivating viewers, both adults and children, to read, and they use actors to promote reading. We Arabs - the nation of "Read" - are in utter need of following the example of South Korea in accordance with the words of the Prophet Mohammad: "Wisdom is the lost property of a believer. Wherever he finds it, he is the most deserving of it."

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